



The Alabama Veteran

Bob Riley
Governor

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner

W I N T E R 2 0 0 7

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Valentine's Day—
February 14, 2007
- President's Day—
February 19, 2007
- St. Patrick's Day—
March 17, 2007
- Board of Veterans
Affairs Meets —
April 6, 2007
- Easter—April 8, 2007
- Tax Day—April 17, 2007

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Commissioner's Corner

Greetings and best wishes as we enter into a new year of promise, hope and aspirations for veterans. 2006 was a good year and we ended on a high note with VA health care being evaluated as the leading health care provided in America. The ADVA also made great strides in realigning the department to be more efficient, responsive, and in sync with other state agencies.

We also ended 2006 with the sad loss of Mr. Willie Pruitt, a SBVA member from Talladega. The late Mr. Pruitt was a veteran's veteran who stood as a strong advocate for all veterans and made a significant impact on the lives of countless veterans. The SBVA and ADVA will miss this staunch warrior and veterans will miss a relentless advocate.

The ADVA looks forward to working with the 2007 Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee. If you have the opportunity to meet any of these esteemed senators, please thank them for their support to veterans. Senate Committee members are: Senators Jimmy Holley, Hinton Mitchem, Larry Dixon, Hank Erwin, Jr., Zeb Little, Wendell Mitchell, Quinton Ross, W. H. "Pat" Lindsey, and J. T. Waggoner.

As we move toward the 2007 legislative session there are three principles to keep in focus. They are: veteran requirements, program funding, and benefit outreach initiatives. The Alabama Legislature convenes on March 6, 2007 and is scheduled to end by June 18, 2007.



In order to better serve veterans and National Guard service-members, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was created.

MOU Participants are left to right: Thomas Kaarh, Department of Labor, Phyllis Kennedy, Department of Industrial Relations, Dr. Robert Ratliff, CAVHCS, Clyde Marsh, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, Ricardo Randle, VA Regional Office, Rochelle Hudson, VA Southeast Network, MG Mark Bowen, Alabama National Guard, and Don Wood, Governor's Office.

Its purpose is to define the requirements, obligations, and agencies necessary to conduct presentations and process benefits information and assist in filing claims for benefits.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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Alabama Medicaid Programs

The State of Alabama Medicaid Agency has several programs that can help eligible low income Medicare beneficiaries with their Medicare costs.

The major programs are as follows: the Supplemental Security Income (SSI)-Full Medicaid program which pays for all Medicare costs; the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program which pays for the Part B premium, the Medicare co-payments and the deductibles; the specified Low Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLMB) and the Qualifying Individual Programs (Q1 & 2) which either pay for the Part B premiums or provide partial refunds of the monthly Medicare premium.

Each program is unique and income dependent among other criteria. For more information on these programs, please contact your local Social Security Administration and Medicare Agency Offices.



Alabama's Veterans Need Your Help!

Alabamians proudly answered the call to arms to defend this nation from aggression! Now it's your turn to express your appreciation for the sacrifices these proud men and women made while defending our freedom around the world!

In 1988, the Alabama Legislature enacted a law providing for the Alabama Veterans Trust Fund check-off box on the state income tax form. This program provides concerned citizens of Alabama a way to donate all or a portion of their state tax refunds for the benefit of Alabama Veterans.

This year, please give something back to help support Alabama's ailing and aged veterans. All monies received through the Alabama Income Tax Check-off Program are used to help support Alabama State Veterans Homes programs and directly benefiting the residents of these homes while insuring our continuing commitment to provide the highest quality of health care for Alabama's heroes.

If you use a tax accountant or preparer, ask them to complete line 31 and schedule DC of your Alabama Form 40 and make your donation to the Alabama Veterans Trust Fund. If you do not receive a state income tax refund, please consider making a direct donation to show your support. Send your check payable to the Alabama Veterans Home Trust Fund, P.O. Box 1509, Montgomery, Alabama 36102. Remember, your tax-deductible donation will go directly to support the veteran residents of Alabama's three State Veterans Homes.

President Bush Signs Veterans Bill

(Washington, DC) On Friday, December 22, 2006, President George Bush signed into law a \$3.2 billion comprehensive benefits and health care bill for veterans sponsored by U.S. Senator Larry Craig, the outgoing chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Among its provisions, the Veterans Benefits, Healthcare, and Information Technology Act of 2006 partially overturns a policy dating back to the Civil War era that has prohibited veterans from hiring attorneys to help them seek veterans' benefits until they have spent months – sometimes years – exhausting the administrative process. The original policy came during a time when lawyers were often self-trained and notoriously unscrupulous. As signed into law, this bill will now allow veterans or other VA claimants to hire attorneys during VA's appeal process.

Other key provisions of the bill include:

- Adding \$65 million to increase the number of clinicians treating post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Adding \$2 million for additional blind rehabilitation specialists and increases the number of facilities where the specialists will be located.
- The new law should also help rural states by allowing VA to create a pilot program which makes non-VA facilities – such as private nursing homes or community hospitals – eligible for state veterans' home per diem payments.

According to Senator Craig, "We accomplished a lot for veterans with this bill. It's a great way to finish the year."

New WWII Monument in Alexander City

Alexander City residents now have their very own World War II Monument honoring the soldiers from Tallapoosa County who fought and died during World War II.

The new WWII monument was unveiled at the Charles E. Bailey Sportplex, on December 3, 2006. It displays the 69 names of the men from Tallapoosa County who made the ultimate sacrifice during WWII. Over 3,000 Tallapoosa County residents served in the military during the war.

The Tallapoosa County Veterans Committee hopes to build a monument for every American war that was fought by Tallapoosa County Veterans. The next project on the committee's list is a monument for Vietnam Veterans.

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Roland Day—Birmingham
Wayne Dial—Talladega
Joe McDonald—Birmingham
Charles Stephens—Fort Payne

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Robert J. "Bob" Hewitt—Blountsville

Vietnam Veterans of America

Ken Rollins—Oxford

Millions Receive Cost-Of-Living Increases for VA Benefits

WASHINGTON – Millions of veterans and eligible family members will see their disability compensation, pension, and survivors' benefits increased as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides an annual cost-of-living increase for key benefits.

A recent law signed by President Bush provides a 3.3 percent increase in disability compensation and survivors' benefits. Eligible veterans and family members will see this increase starting in their January 2007 checks.

Under the veteran's disability compensation program, tax-free payments will generally range from \$115 to \$2,471 per month depending on the degree of disability. Special payments up to \$7,070 per month apply to the most severely injured veterans.

Pension disability benefits will also be increased by the same percentage and effective on the same date. The maximum annual rate for permanently and totally disabled veterans can range from \$10,929 to \$18,234. Payments under this program are based on household income.

This increase also applies to survivors of veterans who died in service or from a service-connected disability. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) survivors' benefit payments can range from \$1,067 to \$2,443 per month.

Survivors of wartime veterans receiving death pension are also entitled to an increase. The maximum annual payment rate for a surviving spouse can range from \$7,329 to \$11,715. Benefits under this program are intended to bring an eligible spouse's income to a level established by law. Additional allowances may be payable for helpless, minor or school age children.

Harvard Gives Federal Hospitals Top Grades

WASHINGTON (January 18, 2007) – A comprehensive study by Harvard Medical School concludes that federal hospitals, including those run by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provide the best care available anywhere for some of the most common life-threatening illnesses.

“This recognition by Harvard should assure veterans of the quality of VA's world-class health care system,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. “Veterans have earned only the best. And we can prove that's exactly what VA is providing.”

The study was published December 11 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, a journal for health care professionals. Researchers looked at congestive heart failure, heart attack and pneumonia across the health care industry and found that patients in federal facilities are more likely to receive high-quality care than those in for-profit hospitals.

The study found that hospitals operated by the federal government and the military received higher performance ratings than other hospitals studied. A large percentage of federal hospitals are operated by VA.

The Harvard Medical School study is the latest recognition of the high quality of VA health care. In 2006, VA received a prestigious “Innovations in American Government” Award from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government for its advanced electronic health records and performance measurement system.

“Aid and Attendance” An Under-Used Benefit

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to inform wartime veterans and surviving spouses of deceased wartime veterans about an under-used, special monthly pension benefit called Aid and Attendance.

“Veterans have earned this benefit by their service to our nation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. “We want to ensure that every veteran or surviving spouse who qualifies has the chance to apply.”

Although this is not a new program, not everyone is aware of his or her potential eligibility. The Aid and Attendance pension benefit may be available to wartime veterans and surviving spouses who have in-home care or who live in nursing homes or assisted living facilities.

Many elderly veterans and surviving spouses whose incomes are above the congressionally mandated legal limit for a VA pension may still be eligible for the special monthly Aid and Attendance benefit if they have large medical expenses, including nursing home expenses, for which they do not receive reimbursement.

To qualify, claimants must be incapable of self support and in need of regular personal assistance.

The basic criteria for the Aid and Attendance benefit include the inability to feed oneself, to dress and undress without assistance, or to take care of one’s own bodily needs. People who are bedridden or need help to adjust special prosthetic or orthopedic devices may also be eligible, as well as those who have a physical or mental injury or illness that requires regular assistance to protect them from hazards or dangers in their daily environment.

For a wartime veteran or surviving spouse to qualify for this special monthly pension, the veteran must have served at least 90 days of active military service, one day of which was during a period of war, and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

Wartime veterans who entered active duty on or after September 8, 1980, (October 16, 1981, for officers) must have completed at least 24 continuous months of military service or the period for which they were ordered to active duty.

If all requirements are met, VA determines eligibility for the Aid and Attendance benefit by adjusting for un-reimbursed medical expenses from the veteran’s or surviving spouse’s total household income. If the remaining income amount falls below the annual income threshold for the Aid and Attendance benefit, VA pays the difference between the claimant’s household income and the Aid and Attendance threshold.

The Aid and Attendance income threshold for a veteran without dependents is now \$18,234 annually. The threshold increases to \$21,615 if a veteran has one dependent, and by \$1,866 for each additional dependent. The annual Aid and Attendance threshold for a surviving spouse alone is \$11,715. This threshold increases to \$13,976 if there is one dependent child, and by \$1,866 for each additional child.

Additional information and assistance in applying for the Aid and Attendance benefit may be obtained by visiting any of our county offices or by calling 1-800-827-1000. Applications may be submitted on-line at www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp.

ADVA Conducts Survey

On January 12, 2007, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs began conducting a telephone survey of Alabama veterans as part of a study of future veterans health care needs. The survey, conducted by GMA Research, is taken utilizing a random sampling of veterans located throughout the State of Alabama.

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs operates three veterans' homes located in Huntsville, Alexander City, and Bay Minette, which are skilled nursing facilities. This study will assist the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs in planning for the expansion of existing veterans' programs and will assist them in determining the future long-term care needs of all veterans.

All veterans contacted are encouraged to participate. Anyone with questions about the project can call Kim Justice, ADVA Veterans Homes Coordinator at 334-242-5077 for assistance.

Visit Battleship Park

Under the direction of the USS Alabama Battleship Commission, the Mobile Battleship Memorial Park offers a unique and exciting visit and opportunity for families and tour groups to see and touch an exciting part of our history. From the mighty Battleship USS Alabama to the submarine USS Drum along with combat aircraft, tank and artillery displays, the spirit of military pride is alive in the great park. For more information, visit: <http://www.ussalabama.com>.

GI Bill Expiration Date

Once you have separated from the service you have 10 years to use all of your benefits. Although separating from service "starts the clock" on your 10-year time limit, you should know that if you rejoin active-duty service for more than 90 days, during the 10-year period, your 10-year clock is reset. In other words, you get 10 years from your last discharge date.

Alabama Annual Professional Development Conference

The 19th Annual Professional Development Conference for State Secretaries and Administrative Personnel was held December 4–6 at the Perdido Beach Resort. The theme was "Follow Your Yellow Brick Road." The opening day featured a motivational speech by John Croyle, Founder and Executive Director of Big Oak Ranch. Mr. Croyle challenged everyone to know their purpose, have passion about what they do, and do their personal best in everything they do.

The following day conference participants attended their choice of small group breakout sessions. Session topics included "Business Writing: The Wizard's Top Five Tips for Using Pronouns," "Interpersonal Skills: The Wizard Never Worked in My Office," "Reaching the Rainbow: Accomplish More in Your Life," "Stress Management: How to "Ease on Down the Road," and "Reinvent Yourself: Owning Your Own Wizard."



Some Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Administrative Support Assistants at the recent State Professional Development Conference.

The final day was made complete when Sandra Lucas from the Governor's office spoke on "Overcoming Difficulties Traveling the Yellow Brick Road" and training consultant Martha Ann Hill spoke on "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."